2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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In April, when the sap rises, the Gros Ventres scraped the juice from the inner bark peeled from cottonwood and sometimes even from box-elder. They also chewed the gum from pines. Infusions of cherry bark or roots and peppermint were said to have been drunk as tea, but such concoctions were considered usually more in the nature of medicines.

So long as the Gros Ventres had the buffalo, relatively little in the way of foodstuffs from the white man were imported. Sugar, flour, occasional fresh fruits, coffee and tea were known and used to some extent after about 1855.[10] The possibility of obtaining whiskey, was, however, one of the items which determined the popularity of a given trading place. Incidentally, tobacco was an important item of trade after 1800, although prior to that time the Gros Ventres had raised their own.[11]

Clothing and Adornment

The importance of the buffalo in the economy of the Gros Ventres was as obvious in clothing and in shelter as it was in food. The buffalo robe, dressed with the hair on, was perhaps the most valuable article inasmuch as it was not only a regular part of their garb, but also was the main article of trade with the whites after about 1830. When decorated, it had high prestige value as a gift.

Seldom was the hide of a buffalo older than two years used for robes since the fur of those of greater age was usually scabby even in the fall when the coats were in best condition. It required the skin of a yearling to make a robe for a twelve-year-old, and the skins of calves made robes for smaller children. When the demand of the trade for robes was very great, the large wool blanket sometimes replaced the robe for wearing apparel and for bedding.

Most of the other articles of clothing were made from well-dressed deer, elk and antelope skins.[12] Deer and elk were more

[10] See p. 22.

[11] This tradition is confirmed by Cocking in 1772, who writes, p. 111, "The tobacco they use is their own planting which hath disagreable flavor. I have preserved a specimen." Kroeber's informants denied knowledge of the tradition.

[12] In 1854 Denig, pp. 464-65, describes the cloth bought for clothing for summer and fall wear, but states that a real hunter must have a buffalo robe, moccasins, mittens, cap, skin leggings and an extra buffalo robe.

2: Flannery E-5 (1940-1948) 1953
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CHAPTER X

OLD AGE AND DEATH

It is the opinion of the now aged Gros Ventres that the proportion of old persons was much greater in the past than it has been since they have taken up the white man's ways; and further, that the aged then retained their health and vigor to a greater degree.[1] One old woman stated that when she was young, there used to be many old people, but that they died off when there were no more buffalo. She added: "People lived to a good old age on the things that the Supreme Being provided,—roots, wild vegetables and fruits, dried meats and berries. In those days, too, they drank broth instead of tea and coffee. Old folks didn't lose their teeth then, although even young girls do nowadays. Their teeth eventually got worn down, but they seldom pulled them. In fact, if an old person should lose a tooth, he thought it was awful and was sure that he was ready for the grave. Furthermore, people didn't get white hair until they were ready for 'old age sleep'—very old people sleep most of the time—yet now one sees middle-aged and even younger people with gray hair like the whites have."

Status and Treatment of the Aged

It was believed that a person who had lived to a ripe old age had been privileged to do so by the Supreme Being. Therefore, they reasoned, if you are good to old people, these in turn will pray to the Supreme Being for your health, long life, and success. Children were instructed explicitly to be good to the aged,—to feed them, to clothe them, and to help them in difficulties,—as well as to seek out those so blessed and ask for their prayers. It was

[1] Allowance should of course be made for the fact that "old age" is a relative term. When it was said that young men were urged to marry "older experienced women," this referred to a woman of perhaps twenty to twenty-five. See pp. 171–72. A woman on the northern plains was "old" at forty, according to Denig, p. 513.

3: Cooper E-5 (1938-1940) 1957
NQ13 Gros Ventre NQ13

hand hidden fresh kidney, with the fat on, under their dresses would on being struck fall over, "killed," and the "hunters" would pretend to cut open the dead "cows" and extract the kidney fat. The "bull," too, would be shot down with blunt arrows and "butchered," the kidney extracted first and a bit of it (and presumably of the fat taken from the "cows") offered to each person present and eaten.

The "cows," "bull" and "calves" made their way quickly back to the dance lodge, in a mimic stampede. After re-entering, the "cows" kept walking round and round the center pole, "puffing and puffing" as if winded,—representing, we may reasonably infer, buffalo milling around in a corral at the end of a drive. After a while they all sat down and partook of a good feast, and after the feast was over danced.

It was apparently at the time of this terminal feast (possibly at some other time or times in the four-day rite,—our information is not quite clear on the point) that prominent men would come into the dance lodge for a drink of "berry water." Near the center pole was a big wooden bowl containing berries crushed to a juice "something like syrup fixed real sweet," and hay[illegible] tached. Prominent men, "all the great big chiefs," [illegible]g men, warriors," were invited to come in and take a [illegible]hey did not come in any old way. They would come in [illegible] the door, to the left side, drink, and then go out a[illegible]ht side." They had to leave something as pay, such [illegible] rifle, or a horse, "because it was a great honor to b[illegible] drink." During this drinking by the "chiefs," the "bull" ha[illegible] in her place silently with her horned headdress on and her he[illegible] hanging down. Coming Daylight, at this juncture in one of the dances in which she was a "calf," remarked to her grandmother: "Well, that 'bull' does not even move. She just sits there." Her grandmother admonished her: "Don't say that. You are not supposed to 'tease' about it." "Well," Coming Daylight said, "'he' pushed me away when I went to my 'mother.'" After the whole dance was over, Coming Daylight used to tell all about it, but her grandmother would caution her: "Don't talk about it. You are not supposed to laugh over it."